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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 FREETOWN 000217

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: MAY POLITICAL ROUND-UP - FREETOWN

REF: A. 08 FREETOWN 563

[1](#)B. FREETOWN 79

Classified By: Poloff Amy LeMar for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: President Koroma continued to focus in May towards reconciling the country's two major political parties, urging them to implement the [communiquQ](#) signed following the unrest in March. On the heels of the Cabinet reshuffle, Ministers have signed new performance contracts. The disintegration of the PMDC party continues as key members resign. A task force assembled by the Vice President traveled to Kambia province to investigate a church burning in Rogbon village. The new Minister of Lands embarked on a house-cleaning campaign, suspending fourteen senior staff for alleged corrupt activities. The murder case resulting from the hazing death of a Fourah Bay College student closed, with the judgment scheduled for June 12. Sierra Leone continues to benefit from investment and assistance from China, Israel, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Italy. End Summary.

PRESIDENT KOROMA COMMITS HIMSELF TO PARTY HARMONY

[1](#)2. (U) On May 1st President Koroma held a consultative meeting with stakeholders on the full implementation of the joint [communiquQ](#) signed by the APC and the SLPP on April 2. Representatives from both the APC and SLPP, as well as ERSG Michael Schulenburg, attended. President Koroma urged the parties to cooperate with an independent inquiry to investigate allegations of rape and sexual violence on March 16 as well as the Independent Review relating to some politically-motivated incidents that occurred in Gendema, Pujehun District, Freetown and Kenema. President Koroma also presented a draft of the Terms of Reference for each of the proposed bodies.

MINISTERS SIGN NEW PERFORMANCE CONTRACTS WITH PRESIDENT

[1](#)3. (C) President Koroma signed new performance contracts with his Ministers at State House on May 7. During the signing ceremony the President reminded his ministers that they made a commitment to the people that they will effect change. He implored them to make sure they put the interest of the people they serve first. The President said the new contracts have higher targets and he will hold ministers fully responsible for the day-to-day operations of their ministries. Comment: It is widely believed in many quarters that the last Cabinet reshuffle ([reftel B](#)) was based on each ministers' successes relative to their contracts' stated goals, though a public accounting of ministers' performance never took place. Post views the Cabinet reshuffle as highly political, and only tangentially rooted in the performance contracts. End comment.

14. (C) Benjamin O. Davies, founding member of the PMDC and former Minister of Land and Country Planning resigned from the party on May 8. He stated in his resignation letter that he is departing from the PMDC, "driven by the determination to achieve the objective of a better life for all by being a part of that vision of President Koroma." He continued by remarking that the leadership of the PMDC had deviated from the principles of "positive change" they once stood for. Comment: The resignation of Mr. Davies is not surprising as he was not on good terms with the leadership of the party. Many believe that his departure from office was a result of a recommendation by Mr. Margai, leader of the PMDC. There is much speculation that Mr. Davies will join the APC, perhaps in the hopes of regaining a Cabinet position in future. There have been many reported squabbles within the PMDC, resulting in the resignation of former party stalwarts in recent months. Mr. Davies' resignation will widen the divide within the party and may also contribute to its ultimate disintegration. End Comment.

CHURCH BURNING IN KAMBIA

15. (U) The Vice President assembled a task force led by Minister of Social Welfare, Dr. Soccoh Kabbia to investigate the April 29 burning of a church in Rogbon village, near the Guinean border. This incident is extremely unusual in a country that prides itself on maintaining a high level of

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religious tolerance, and the GoSL acted swiftly to address the problem. On May 13, a delegation which included the Ministers of Social Welfare and Works, the president of the Inter-Religious Council, leading figures from the Christian and Muslim communities, and observers from the international community, traveled to Rogbon to view the site and speak with stakeholders.

16. (SBU) The church, built by 4H.I.M. international ministries (a U.S.-based missionary group), was constructed on the site of a former mosque. Most villagers believe this is why it was targeted by vandals, although 4H.I.M. bought the land legally from the village: the mosque had been abandoned for months before the land purchase, and the church encountered no opposition to the sale from the community. The vandals entered the village forcefully (although there were no reported injuries), burned the church, and destroyed a mission-constructed water purification system. The group claimed to be acting on the orders of a Freetown imam. Comment: Post is tracking the ongoing task force and criminal investigations of this incident, and expects that the task force will publish a report of their findings in June. This highly unusual episode of possible religious intolerance created a quiet stir, but did not result in retributive attacks or copy-cat incidents. Post is hopeful that this is an isolated occurrence. End Comment.

NEW MINISTER OF LANDS SUSPENDS 14 TOP STAFF

17. (U) The new Minister of Lands, Housing and the Environment (Note: The Lands portfolio was expanded following the Cabinet reshuffle. End note), Dr. Sandi, suspended fourteen of the Ministry's senior staff on May 25. In a press conference the Minister stated that the Lands Ministry is one of the most corrupt in the country and admonished all to desist from conducting business with the suspended officials. The Minister further stated that most of these officials were not qualified for the jobs they had been doing. Comment: The public perceives the Minister's action as a radical move that will bring sanity to a ministry that is rife with corruption

and a source of frequent conflict. Three years ago a lands official was brutally murdered by squatters and land grabbers for attempting to remove them from lands they illegally acquired. State House is well-aware of the issues within the Ministry and surrounding the land tenuring issue; earlier this year a moratorium was issued on all land sales in the country (reftel A). End Comment.

RULING IN MURDERED STUDENT CASE EXPECTED SOON

18. (C) A critical ruling initially expected to be released May 26 was delayed until June 12 in the case of the Fourah Bay College student who died on December 22, allegedly during a fraternity initiation ceremony. The death of Mohamed Juana, 18, led to a ban on all fraternities and social activities in tertiary-level institutions country-wide. The ruling will determine if there is sufficient evidence for the accused to be tried in High Court, or will be dropped. The outcome of this case is being closely watched by parents and students all over the country; there has been a public outcry for college authorities to monitor initiation rites, which many believe have become dangerous and taken on a distinct cult-like quality. Comment: The magistrate's snail-like pace is quietly being attributed to pressure from unknown sources seeking to influence the case. While expected to be a lengthy ruling, it is unusual for such a substantial delay to be called for. Some sources have indicated that there is intense political interest in this case from all corners, some of whom would like to see the accused be made examples of, while others would prefer to see the case dropped and the ban on fraternities lifted. End comment.

BILATERAL RELATIONS

19. (SBU) Minister of Information and Communication Alhaji I.B Kargbo has announced that, following a warning from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Lungi Airport would be blacklisted if not upgraded to meet modern standards. The Chinese government responded in April by agreeing to fund the upgrade. Minister Kargbo claims that the upgraded airport would also contain a modern hall for international conferences. The Chinese Ambassador to Sierra Leone informed journalists in a press conference on May 17 that the Chinese government will also build two more hydro-power stations for Sierra Leone over the next two

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years, one in Port Loko and the other in Makeni. Comment: The Chinese government's decision to upgrade Lungi Airport is consistent with their ongoing policy to construct strategic, high-profile buildings throughout the country. Other examples are the Youyi Building, which houses over 80 percent of all GoSL ministries, the Sierra Leone Police Head Quarters, the Sierra Leone Army Head Quarters, and the National Stadium. The Chinese have also pledged to construct a new Ministry of Foreign Affairs office building. End Comment.

110. (U) in April, the visiting UK Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for International Development, Ivan Lewis, committed 28 million Pounds to support the GoSL, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and to programs aimed at improving reproductive and child health care. Mr. Lewis used the opportunity to appeal to political party leaders to eschew violence as the country moves forward, and emphasized the British government's commitment to supporting Sierra Leone despite global financial challenges.

111. (U) The Nigerian High Commissioner to Sierra Leone said his government is considering a multi-sectoral aid package totaling USD 300 million to support Sierra Leone's development objectives this year. High Commissioner Echegile said his government has also approved the deployment of 133

members of the Nigerian Technical Aid Corps to Sierra Leone, including medical personnel and teachers.

¶12. (U) A Saudi Arabian delegation led by Dr. Abdullah Abdul Mushin Al-Turki, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, visited Sierra Leone during the first week of May. Foreign Minister Zainab Bangura thanked the Saudis for their past and present assistance, and urged them to continue to help develop Sierra Leone's health, agriculture, and economic sectors. Minister Bangura said the government needs the assistance of its international partners to overcome the challenges faced by a post-war country.

¶13. (U) The state of Israel has offered scholarships for two RSLAF personnel to study agriculture in Israel. The Sierra Leone-Israel Friendship Society representative said the aim is to build the capacity of officers in vegetable and crop production. He also said that an expert from Green 2000 based in Israel is in Sierra Leone to do feasibility studies for a seed multiplication center for rice. Comment: The relationship between Israel and Sierra Leone was very strong in the 1960's and 70's, when Israelis built the House of Parliament and the maximum security prison. The relationship has waned in recent years and some Sierra Leoneans have written op-eds in local newspapers pushing for closer bilateral ties with Israel. End Comment.

¶14. (U) As part of the celebration marking the 48th Independence anniversary of Sierra Leone, the Iranian Medical Center in Freetown provided free medical care to all patients visiting the hospital on April 25-27. The Iran Red Crescent Society also donated an ambulance worth \$80,000 to the hospital.

¶15. (U) The Italian government donated a large consignment of medical equipment and other items to the Wilberforce military hospital in Freetown.

FEDZER